

## House Republican Press Release

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### Legislative Session Enters Final Weeks



*By state Rep. Toni Boucher, R-143<sup>rd</sup>, Wilton, Norwalk*

The regular 2004 session is approaching its conclusion, and you may be interested in some of the issues under discussion that impact our families, our communities and our state.

#### **Congratulations to UConn**

The state is enjoying a great moment in history as both the men's and women's basketball teams brought home NCAA national championships. This is significant not only for the university, its students, faculty and staff, but for the entire state. The state's prestige and reputation have been elevated, which also influences its economy. Your tax investment has had a very positive return in academic and athletic prominence. The wins also, at least for the moment, lifted a cloud that has overshadowed the state as it investigated whether to impeach its Governor.

Hear is a little background on the process.

#### **Rowland Committee Of Inquiry**

The state House of Representatives has created a Committee of Inquiry to investigate whether sufficient grounds exist to impeach Governor John G. Rowland. I voted to create this committee, so that we can base our decisions on the truth, rather than rumor and allegations. I also sent a letter to the governor calling on him to resign, stating that all voters expect that the Office of Governor be led by a presence of honesty, integrity and ethical behavior.

The committee is considering standards for impeachable offenses, while also reviewing documents in the case. The bipartisan committee will call witnesses to testify and make recommendations to impeach or not. The full house would vote on articles of impeachment by a simple majority. If the articles of impeachment are passed, the governor would step aside and the lieutenant governor would run the state during the trial. The chief justice of the Connecticut Supreme Court would preside over the trial in the senate. Then, a 2/3 vote by the Senators would decide if the governor should permanently be barred from office.

## **State Ethics Laws**

Even though our state has strong ethics laws, we need:

- An increase in the civil penalty for ethics violations from the present \$2,000 to a maximum of \$5,000.
- An extension of the statute of limitations for the prosecution of ethics violations from three to five years.
- A \$50 cap on the value of gifts state employees can give to supervisors or to elected officials to whom they report.

## **Other Key Issues of the 2004 Legislative Session**

The 2004 short session ends May 5. During this session focused on the state budget, committees attempt to restrict the bills they raise, and individual legislators may propose only bills that are budget-related. Increasingly, the short session has become more like the long sessions in that more than 4,000 bills are proposed, and 200 may become law.

## **State Budget Gap**

Adjustments will be made to the state budget, which is running a current year deficit estimated at up to \$84 million. The final budget must remain well under the state-spending cap because unanticipated expenses frequently run \$60 million a year over budget. I oppose borrowing money to cover budget shortfalls, and I believe we can balance the budget without new taxes.

## **Medical Malpractice**

The legislature's is considering a law to address the rising cost and availability of medical malpractice insurance for doctors, particularly "high risk" practices such as delivering babies.

However, the two-year debate in which I have been actively involved has pitted trial lawyers, many of whom serve in the legislature, against the medical profession. This has stalled the reform process.

## **Opposing Marijuana**

I testified and conducted a press conference stressing that the proposed legalizing of marijuana as "medicine" sends the wrong signal to Connecticut children who are taught to avoid drugs. Just after passing stringent new laws to ban tobacco smoking in public places, it would be counterproductive to relax the use of marijuana. There are recognized medical alternatives to the use of marijuana, and smoked marijuana contains hundreds of harmful chemicals.

## **Reforming Government**

To ensure a more open state government that is responsive to its citizens, I am supporting several reforms, such as requiring:

- All budget deliberations to be conducted in open meetings.
- All legislative sessions to end at midnight.
- Public hearings on all proposed tax increases or new taxes before they are considered by the full House or Senate.
- Legislation to be publicly available via the internet, at least 72 hours before a vote.
- All legislative committee agendas to be publicly available on the internet 36 hours in advance
- All state employee labor contracts to be voted up or down by the full legislature, rather than taking effect automatically.

## **Vehicle Emissions Probe**

Continued problems with the state's new vehicle emissions testing program have prompted my colleagues and I to ask for a full review and a stop to computer glitches that have caused vehicles to fail the test without any reason.

Meanwhile, motorists will be receiving notices with test dates for their vehicles over the next two years. You can determine your vehicle's test date and local test sites at [ctemissions.com](http://ctemissions.com), or call the Vehicle Emissions Hotline at 1-888-828-8399.

Thank you for the opportunity to represent you. If you have any comments or questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at 1-800-842-1423 or by e-mail at [toni.boucher@housegop.state.ct.us](mailto:toni.boucher@housegop.state.ct.us).